

First Uses of Perfins

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Recently a correspondent in Denmark asked when perfins were first used in several European countries. The question sent me on a brief search through my own library and caused me to file off a few letters and some e-mail to other members of the Perfins Club.

It turns out that we really do not have firm data about when perfins were first used in most countries. In some cases, we know when postal authori-

ties gave official approval for the use of stamps with perforated insignia, but documented first uses seem to be tough to obtain.

It is well known that Joseph Sloper of London received a patent on a machine to perforate insignia into postage stamps in 1863 and that he finally received "official permission" to perforate British postage stamps on March 1, 1869. We also know that he apparently pushed the date a bit and actually produced perfins for experimental purposes sometime between getting the patent and getting official approval for the device's use.

We also know that the United States Post Office did not grant permission to perfin stamps until nearly 40 years later in 1908. Paul H. Gault's May 26, 1908 cover from B.F. Cummins Company of Chicago, IL is one of the earliest documented uses of perfins in the United States (see "Lightning Strikes Twice" *The Perfins Bulletin*, July/August 1989, page 145. NB: John Lyding reported that their may be an earlier cover that he is attempting to track down.)

What about the rest of the world? I turned to former foreign catalog editor Bob Schwerdt for help. I combined his response with my own notes

to come up with a tentative list of "first usages" of perfins in several countries. This list is provided below.

<u>Country</u>	<u>First Use of Perfins</u>
Australian States	1877
Austro-Hungarian Empire	Authorized April 4, 1877
Belgium	1872
Canada	Authorized 1887; known use 1895
Ceylon	1870s
Czechoslovakia	1918
Denmark	1878
France	Authorized 1878; known use March 15, 1876
Germany	Authorized 1877; known use 1878
Ireland	1922
Italy	1878
Malaya	1870s
Netherlands	1875
New Zealand	1883
Poland	Known use April 26, 1892
Portugal	1884
Romania	Authorized 1891; first used 1892
Russia	1894
Spain	Known use January 11, 1889
Sweden	1907
Switzerland	Authorized 1876 or 1878 (conflicting sources)
United States	First known use May 26, 1908

My correspondent's question introduces a need for additional research into the topic. Early in 1997, we will be asking Perfins Club members to take part in a worldwide "census" which will include a question about the earliest known usage in each country. In the interim, I would appreciate hearing from members who have examples of early known usage in any country.